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ABSTRACT

The characteristics of a state-mandated principal evaluation system are presented based on a survey of 149 principals and 121 superintendents in North Carolina. The means by which satisfaction with the evaluation process are related to the means for assessing performance, the criteria applied to principals' work, and the type and sources of information gathered to assess performance were also studied. North Carolina uses a standard evaluation process based on the conceptual frameworks of K. D. Peterson, Natriello, and S. D. Dornbusch in order to encompass the process of assessment, the perceptions of this process by those involved, and means of improving the system. Specific assessment criteria and organizational and extra-organizational sources of evaluative information are examined. Data were gathered via a questionnaire using open-ended and Likert-scale items. Results indicate that: (1) superintendents have clearer and more positive perceptions of the process than do principals; (2) the two groups do not perceive the same actions to be occurring in the evaluation process; (3) principals believe that superintendents rely more heavily on external measures of principal performance, while superintendents report a reliance on internal measures; and (4) specific, identifiable factors are associated with principal satisfaction with the process. Eleven tables are provided. (TJH)

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The Status of Evaluation of Principals: Administrators Perceptions and Opportunities and Obstacles to Improving the Process

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INTRODUCTION

As school effectiveness continues to be a dominant national concern, much that has been written identifies the principal as the critical factor in a school's success. As Barth states (Lieberman & Miller, 1984): "It is not the teachers, or the central office people, or the university people who are causing the schools to be the way they are or changing the way they might be. It is whoever lives in the principal's office" (p. 61).

The role of the principal is complex, dynamic, and individualized. It is based on expectations derived from research, law, and practice; and requires balancing central office expectations, the demands of teachers, and the concerns of parents. Frequently, those interests are conflicting.

Most of the research focuses on the principal's role as the instructional leader. On the other hand, law and policy typically define the role as one of management. Principals meanwhile (Peterson, 1977-78) view the job as one in which they constantly "change gears" due to the fact that their activities are highly varied and often initiated by others.

Improving the supervision and evaluation of personnel has gained a great deal of attention. Though many have examined the evaluation of teachers (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975; Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981; Darling-Hammond, et.al., 1983), only recently have studies examined the evaluation of principals (Duke & Stiggins, 1985; Harrison & Peterson, 1987). The state of North Carolina is in the process of revamping the state mandated principal evaluation system upon which this study is based.

This paper describes the characteristics of a state mandated principal evaluation system based on a survey of principals and superintendents. It also addresses the ways satisfaction with the evaluation process are related to the means for assessing performance, the criteria applied to principals' work, and the type and sources of information gathered to assess performance. The primary purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of principal evaluation in a state (North Carolina) which employs a standard process from the conceptual frameworks of Peterson(1984) and Natriello and Dornbusch (981) in order to understand the process of assessment, the perceptions of this process by those involved, and identify suggestions for improvement. In addition, this paper examines the effect of specific assessment criteria, as well as organizational scurces of evaluative information and extra-organizational sources of evaluative information on the degree to which principals consider the process reasonable and fair.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Dornbusch and Scott (1975) developed a comprehensive model for evaluation which was applied to teachers (Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981). This model includes four clearly defined states in the evaluation process. These stages (Figure 1) are: (1) allocating tasks, (2) criteria setting, (3) sampling performance and/or outputs, and (4) appraising. Each stage consists of a different set of tasks that combine to produce an effective, reliable, stable, and accepted process of evaluation for subordinates (Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981). This model was used to examine the evaluation of principals in North Carolina.

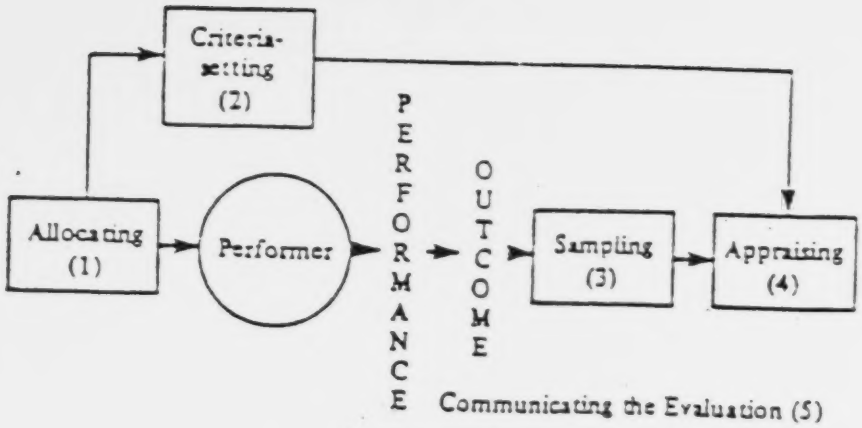

FIGURE 1
A Model of the Evaluation Process

From Pitfalls in the evaluation of principals, by G. Natriello and S.M. Dornbusch, 1981, The Administrator's Notebook, 29, p. 1. Copyright by The University of Chicago.

In the first stage of the evaluation process superiors should clearly assign a set of tasks to subordinates. The assignment of tasks varies by the type of task. According to Natriello and Dornbusch (1981) tasks can be characterized as either active or inert. When tasks are active, the successful performance of the task is highly unpredictable (e.g., remediating an incompetent teacher or dealing with irate parents). In these situations the allocation of the task occurs most often through delegation. When superiors delegate responsibility for a task, the subordinate is granted autonomy to decide the means to achieve the ends, but is held accountable for results. When tasks are inert, successful performance of the task is predictable (e.g., preparing attendance reports or processing book orders). In these cases the allocation of the task occurs through issuance of directives or the specification of set procedures. Directives offer little discretion and success is easier to determine. Success, though, can be very difficult to measure when the tasks are active. How does one evaluate the success of being an "educational leader?"

The second stage involves the establishment of criteria used to appraise successful performance. Subordinates need to know both what they will be judged on and the level they need to achieve. It is difficult to specify criteria for some tasks (e.g., hiring effective teachers) and relatively easy to set criteria for other tasks (e.g., budgeting enough money for classroom materials). At present there are few reliable criteria by which to measure good against poor administrative practice.

The third stage involves superiors monitoring performances or outputs in order to gather data on task accomplishment. Frequent monitoring using numerous sources of data will increase the degree to which subordinates view the evaluation as soundly based (Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981).

In the final appraisal stage, the evaluator combines the preceding stages of the process to arrive at a specific assessment. The clarity, specificity, and reliability of those prior stages have a dramatic effect on principal acceptance and satisfaction with the process. If the early stages are poorly constructed or performed, the evaluation may not be reliable and will likely have little effect on principal performance.

THE PROBLEM

While many districts and states have developed specific and complex procedures for the evaluation of principals, I have sought to describe the process based on the perceptions of those

involved with the process: superintendents and principals. If the evaluation process is to be effective and provide the desired results, improvement of the educational process, it is necessary that those involved have similar understandings.

This study yields data which identify and compare the beliefs of superintendents and principals regarding the process, focus, and purpose of the evaluation of principals. It determines those sources of information superintendents utilize to gather data to evaluate principals as identified by superintendents and principals. Also provided is a description of what the two groups feel is actually occurring in the process.

In addition, the relationships between principals' satisfaction with the evaluation process and the perceived effect of evaluations on performance, the specificity and types of evaluative criteria, and the sources for evaluative information are examined. This paper describes the relationship between assessment criteria and internal versus external sources of information on the degree to which principals consider the process to be fair and reasonable. Additionally, I will determine the relationship between the specificity of criteria, the location of sources of evaluative information, and attitudes of principals towards the assessment process. This knowledge will increase our understanding of the factors related to the stability of evaluation systems for principals.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Based on prior studies (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975; Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981; Peterson, 1984), a questionnaire was developed to gather data on the ways principals were evaluated in one state

employing a complex statewide instrument. The questionnaire used open-ended and Likert scaled questions to gather data on criteria used in the evaluation process, the focus and purpose of evaluation, the sources of information used, and the results or outputs principals perceive to be important to superiors. Responses to open-ended questions were categorized and counted, while means and standard deviations for scaled questions were calculated. Descriptive statistics were used to show the patterns of response for principals and superintendents separately. Comparison of means were made to compare differences between principals' and superintendents' responses on several items. In addition, cross tabulations show the relationships between principals' satisfaction with the evaluation process and the stages of evaluation, as well as the criteria and sources of information they reported used most often to evaluate them.

DATA SOURCE

Data were collected from a random sample of principals and superintendents in North Carolina. North Carolina was selected due to the fact that all administrative units in the state were using the same instrument to evaluate principal performance. The instrument provided the sample with a common base from which to respond.

Of those receiving questionnaires, 74 percent of the principals (n = 149) and 85 percent of the superintendents (n = 121) returned them in usable condition. Of the 149 principals responding to the survey 83 (55.6 percent) reported that the evaluation of principals as conducted in their unit was satisfactory. Forty-five (30.2 percent) were unsatisfied and 21 (14.1 percent) expressed uncertain opinions.

FINDINGS

The evaluation of principals in North Carolina is a process that is both formal and complex. A review of the data indicates that superintendents have clearer and more positive perceptions of the process than do principals. Overall, 73 or 60 percent of the superintendents were satisfied with the appraisal process as conducted, while 56 percent of the principals were satisfied (Harrison, 1985). As a result of greater satisfaction, and clearer perceptions, the superintendents believe the process has a greater effect on principal performance than do principals (Table 1).

Insert Table 1 here

At the same time, among the principals reporting satisfaction with the process, 53 percent agree that performance appraisal has a positive effect on principal performance, while only 4 percent of those dissatisfied believe it has a positive effect (Table 2)

Insert Table 2 here

The allocating of tasks

Allocating tasks is the first component of the evaluation model. The North Carolina principal performance appraisal system includes a job description that outlines some 23 duties and responsibilities of the principal and has a summative appraisal instrument that identifies five major task domains containing two to four major functions, each with several sub-functions.

The major task domains include: (a) General Planning and Oversight; (b) School and Classroom Objectives; (c) Personnel Organization and Management; (d) Clientele Relationships and Their Management; and (e) Allocation of Supplies, Equipment and Support Services.

The majority of the superintendents (81 percent) and principals (72 percent) agree that the major functions of the principalship, as listed in the North Carolina performance appraisal instrument, provide an accurate description of the principal's role. When looking at the satisfied and dissatisfied principals, 81 percent of the satisfied and 69 percent of the dissatisfied agreed. Allocation of tasks does not appear to be a major area of dissatisfaction with the process.

The setting of criteria

The second stage of the model is the setting of criteria. If principals are to direct their energies in the directions desired by the organization, they must have a clear understanding of the expectations and standards of their superiors. Nearly 80 percent of the superintendents report that they make their expectations of principal performance clear, on the other hand, only 58 percent of the principals concur (Harrison, 1985). The difference between those principals who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied is even more pronounced (Table 3).

Insert Table 3 here

Table 4 further illustrates a lack of clearly articulated expectations on the part of superintendents. Principals perceive the reaction of the public to be the most important indicator of principal performance to the superintendent. Based on the items ranked one through three by the principals, it appears that principals believe that superintendents are most concerned with how their work is perceived by others.

Insert Table 4 here

There also exists a difference in perceptions between the satisfied and dissatisfied principals. Table 5 indicates that the dissatisfied principals believe that criteria derived from reference groups outside the organization are more important to superiors than internal assessments from internal sources. The satisfied group views "public reaction" as being important to the superintendent, but they indicate that "atmosphere of the school," an internal criteria, is most important.

Insert Table 5 here

Superintendents, and other evaluators, often assume that subordinates understand what is expected and what criteria will be important in evaluations. Often this is not the case. Since principals are likely to direct their efforts towards the task areas they believe to be important to the superintendent, and making expectations appears to be a source of satisfaction with the process, it is imperative that superintendents strive to

communicate their expectations accurately and thoroughly. It is also a necessary component of effective evaluation.

The sampling of performance or outputs

The third stage of the evaluation model involves superiors monitoring performances to gather data upon which to base the appraisal. Only 51 percent (Harrison, 1985) of the principals surveyed claim to know how superintendents accumulate information to evaluate them. Sixty-five percent of the principals who are satisfied with the process compared to 31 percent of the dissatisfied principals stated that they knew how the superintendent gathered data.

Table 6 shows that there is not much difference between the total principal group and the superintendent group regarding the sources the superintendent uses to gather information. The superintendents and principals appear to generally agree on how performance is sampled. Differences can be found in the frequency that community and parents, and board members are mentioned as sources of information. However, Table 7 indicates that there are identifiable differences between the principals who are satisfied with the evaluation process, and those who are not.

Insert Table 6 here

Insert Table 7 here

When comparing the satisfied and dissatisfied principals, there are three major differences worth noting. Eighty-seven percent of the satisfied principals reported that "the principal directly" is a source of evaluative information for the superintendent. Only 73 percent of the dissatisfied principals indicated that to be the case. Moreover, there is a 13 percent difference in the number of times "the superintendent" is mentioned as a source of information. The largest difference in rankings occurs with "school board members" as a source of information. Sixty percent of the dissatisfied principals to 42 percent of the satisfied principals identify board members as a source of information. Again, the dissatisfied group believes the superintendent looks elsewhere for evaluative data.

Frequency of sampling is a key dimension of the sampling stage. The most direct method of sampling principal performance is by visiting the school and observing the principal at work. Principals who report satisfaction with the evaluative process indicated that their superintendents frequently visit their schools (Table 8).

Insert Table 8 here

The assessing of performance

In the final appraisal stage, the clarity, specificity, and reliability of the prior stages dramatically affect the precision and efficacy of the process. If task allocations were not clear, then principals may have worked on tangential

tasks. If the criteria for appraisal were not specific, then principals may have sought to enhance self defined criteria of performance or personal standards. If performance samples were biased, infrequent, or unreliable, then the appraisal will be based on faulty data. All told, if the early stages are poorly enacted evaluation may not be reliable and have little effect on how principals perform.

As stated, communication is critical in the earlier stages. It is also very important in the final stage. Both positive and negative feedback are required if performance is to be imporved. Tables 9 and 10 associate more communication of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with principal satisfaction with the process.

Insert Table 9 here

Insert Table 10 here

An interesting note is that a majority of the superintendents reported that they frequently communicated dissatisfaction with principal performance. The principal group did not agree (Table 11).

Insert Table 11 here

Even though a majority of superintendents reported frequently communicating dissatisfaction; the percentage was considerably less than those reporting themselves to frequently communicate satisfaction (83 to 59 percent; Harrison, 1985). This situation

may exist for any number of reasons. There may be a reluctance on the part of the superintendent to express dissatisfaction, so they may not communicate it; they may believe they are giving negative feedback more often than they are; or principals may be interpreting as neutral or positive some of the negative communications from the superintendents. Whatever the reason, there is a difference between the amount of negative feedback principals feel they are receiving and superintendents believe they are sending.

While both the satisfied and dissatisfied principals feel that negative feedback is not being sent frequently (Table 10), more of the satisfied principals report it being sent from their superintendents. Again, it seems that more frequent communication, negative or positive, is associated with increased satisfaction with the evaluation process.

CONCLUSIONS

Satisfaction with the appraisal system will effect the impact evaluation will have on principal performance. In reviewing a formal, standardized and complex evaluation system I have found:

1. Superintendents have a more positive feeling toward the principal evaluation process than do principals.

2. Principals and superintendents do not perceive the same actions to be occurring in the evaluation process.

3. Principals believe that superintendents rely more heavily on external measures of principal performance; while superintendents report a reliance on internal measures.

4. The following factors are associated with principal satisfaction with the process; (a) an instrument that makes criteria for performance clear, (b) clearly articulated expectations from the superintendent, (c) a superintendent who communicates both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with principal performance on a frequent basis, (d) a clear understanding of the sources of information utilized to gather evaluative data and frequent sampling, and (e) a superintendent who relies more on sources of information inside than outside of the organization.

Suggestions for practice

1. Superintendents should be clear when they allocate tasks to principals. While the tasks of the principal are diverse and complex, they are often only presented in the general terms of job descriptions. Principals report they are not always sure what they are supposed to be doing (Peterson, 1984). Therefore, superintendents should be specific when they assign tasks to principals.

2. Criteria and standards of performance must be explicit and clear. Descriptive studies suggest that principals are often unsure what criteria superiors use to evaluate their actions or which criteria carry the most weight (Peterson, 1984; Harrison, 1985; Duke & Stiggins, 1985). Superintendents need to communicate clearly their performance expectations, to enable principals to have clear standards toward which to strive.

3. Performance must be sampled frequently and systematically. Where possible, it should be based on reliable, quantifiable measures of performance. Frequent sampling followed

by regular feedback helps subordinates to make needed adjustments in their actions. In providing this feedback superintendents should communicate their dissatisfaction as well as their satisfaction with principal performance, making clear what they have observed.

4. Specific performance and output standards for principals should be developed. Some districts now employ a systematic approach to assessing student performance, and pay a great deal of attention to the quality of teacher evaluation; however, many more districts employ diffuse standards on which they assess principal performance. Appraisal in many districts depends heavily on reference group assessments, intuitive appraisals of performance, and diffuse criteria for evaluation. Meaningful evaluation uses concrete assessments and measureable evaluations of specific criteria.

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Table 1

Overall, the Evaluation of principals as conducted, is satisfactory.

	Strongly Agree (+2)	Agree (+1)	Uncertain (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	MEAN
Superintendents						
Number	3	70	20	26	2	.38
Percentage	2.48	57.85	16.53	21.49	1.65	
All Principals						
Number	4	79	21	37	8	.23
Percentage	2.68	53.02	14.09	24.83	5.37	

These data reported in Harrison, 1985

Table 2

The performance appraisal system for principals has a positive effect on principal performance.

	Strongly Agree (+2)	Agree (+1)	Uncertain (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	MEAN
Satisfied Principals						
Number	2	42	20	16	3	.29
Percentage	2.41	50.6	24.1	19.28	3.61	
Dissatisfied Principals						
Number	0	2	15	21	7	-.73
Percentage	0	4.44	33.33	46.67	15.56	

These data reported in Harrison & Peterson, 1987

Table 3 .

The superintendent makes principal performance expectations clear.

	Strongly Agree (+2)	Agree (+1)	Uncertain (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	MEAN
Satisfied Principals						
Number	11	55	10	6	1	.83
Percentage	13.35	66.27	12.05	7.23	1.2	
Dissatisfied Principals						
Number	0	14	7	22	2	-.28
Percentage	0	31.11	15.56	48.89	4.44	

data reported in Harrison & Peterson, 1987

Table 4

Results of the Principalship the Superintendent Views as Indicators of Principal Performance

Results	Superintendents			Principals		
	Rank	M	%M	Rank	M	%M
General quality of instruction	1	99	87	4	96	66
Teacher performance and morale	2	96	84	3	102	70
Atmosphere of school	3	94	82	2	114	79
Student performance and progress: test scores	4	79	69	5	91	62
Public reaction: positive or negative	5	66	58	1	118	81
Student behavior and principal's relations with students	6	63	55	7	62	43
Adherence to system rules and procedures	7	30	26	6	69	48
Not "making waves"	8	4	3	8	42	29
Others	8	4	3	9	5	3

Rank = indicates the ranking of the result by respondent group

M = number of times a response was mentioned, subjects were given a list with all items and asked to rank the top five

% M = the percentage of respondents mentioning a particular result (These data are reported in Harrison, 1985.)

Table -5

Results of the Principalship the Superintendent Views as Indicators of Principal Performance

	Satisfied			Dissatisfied		
Results	Rank	M	%M	Rank	M	%M
Atmosphere of the school	1	70	84	2	38	84
Public Reaction	2	68	82	1	43	96
Teacher performance and Morale	3	64	77	3	29	64
General Quality of Instruction	4	60	72	3	29	64
Student Performance and Progress (Test Results)	5	56	67	5	28	62
Adherence to System Rules and Regualtions	6	39	47	6	22	49
Student Behavior and Principals Relationship with Students	7	35	42	7	16	36
Not "Making Waves"	8	17	20	7	16	36

Rank = indicates the ranking of the item by respondent group

M = number of times a response was mentioned, subjects were given a list with all items and asked to rank the top five

% M = the percentage of respondents mentioning a particular result

These data reported in Harrison & Peterson, 1987

Table 6

Perceived Sources of Data Superintendents Use for the Evaluation of Principals

	Superintendents			Principals		
Information Source	Rank	M	%M	Rank	M	%M
The principal directly	1	106	87	2	112	75
Central office personnel	2	92	76	3	101	68
Superintendent	3	83	69	5	85	57
Community and parents	4	82	68	1	129	87
Teachers	5	78	64	4	94	63
Reports, written materials	6	67	55	6	75	50
School Board	7	38	31	6	75	50
Test scores	8	15	12	8	26	17
Others	9	6	5	9	8	6

Rank = indicates the ranking of the information by respondent group

M = number of times a response was mentioned, subjects were given a list with eight information sources and asked to rank the top five used by the superintendent

%M = the percentage of respondents mentioning a particular item

(These data are reported in Harrison, 1985.)

Table 7

Sources of Information Used by Superintendents to Gather Data to Evaluate Principals

	Satisfied			Dissatisfied		
Source	Rank	M	%M	Rank	M	%M
Community and Parents	1	76	92	1	43	96
Principal Directly	2	72	87	2	33	73
Central Office Personnel	3	63	76	3	30	67
Teachers	4	57	69	4	29	64
Superintendent	5	53	64	6	23	51
Reports, Written Materials	6	42	51	6	23	51
School Board Memebers	7	35	42	5	27	60
Test Results	8	15	18	8	14	31

Rank = indicates the ranking of the source by repspindent group
M = number of times a response was mentioned, subjects were given a list with all items and asked to rank the top five
%M = the percentage of respondent mentioning a particular result
These data reported in Harrison & Peterson, 1987

Table 8

The superintendent frequently visits the school.

	Strongly Agree (+2)	Agree (+1)	Uncertain (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	MEAN
Satisfied Principals						
Number	4	38	6	33	2	.11
Percentage	4.82	45.78	7.23	39.76	2.41	
Dissatisfied Principals						
Number	1	4	0	21	19	-1.18
Percentage	2.22	8.89	0	46.67	42.22	

These data reported in Harrison & Peterson, 1987

Table 9

The superintendent frequently communicates satisfaction with principal performance.

	Strongly Agree (+2)	Agree (+1)	Uncertain (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	MEAN
Satisfied Principals						
Number	12	53	4	11	3	.72
Percentage	14.46	63.86	4.82	13.25	3.61	
Dissatisfied Principals						
Number	2	17	3	21	2	-.09
Percentage	4.44	37.78	6.67	46.67	4.44	

These data reported in Harrison & Peterson, 1987

Table 10

The superintendent frequently communicates dissatisfaction with principal performance.

	Strongly Agree (+2)	Agree (+1)	Uncertain (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	MEAN
Satisfied Principals						
Number	12	20	18	31	11	.33
Percentage	3.61	24.1	21.69	37.35	3.25	
Dissatisfied Principals						
Number	0	8	4	29	4	-.64
Percentage	0	17.78	8.89	64.44	8.89	

These data are reported in Harrison & Peterson, 1987

Table 11

The superintendent frequently communicates dissatisfaction with principal performance.

	Strongly Agree (+2)	Agree (+1)	Uncertain (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	MEAN
Superintendents						
Number	13	59	6	43	0	.35
Percentage	10.74	48.76	4.96	35.54	0	
All Principals						
Number	5	38	25	64	17	-.34
Percentage	3.36	25.5	16.78	42.95	11.41	

These data reported in Harrison, 1985